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Agency and Virtues

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Abstract

In the philosophy of action, agency manifests the capacity of the agent to act. An agent is one who acts voluntarily, consciously and intentionally. This article studies the relationship between virtues and agency to learn to what extent agency is conceptually and metaphysically dependent on moral or epistemic virtues; whether virtue is a necessary condition for action and agency, besides the belief, desire and intention? Or are virtues necessary merely for the moral or epistemic character of the agent and not his agency? If virtues are constructive elements of personal identity, can we say that virtues are necessary for action and agency? If we accept that virtues play a role in agency, the principle of "Ought Implies Can" makes us face a new challenge; which we will discuss. After explaining the concept of action and agency, I will study the relationship between agency and virtues in the field of ethics and epistemology. Ultimately, I conclude that not only in theories of virtue but also in other ethical theories, virtue is independently necessary for the actualization of agency; even if, conceptually, there might not be any relation between the two. In many cases, virtue can also have a crucial role in prudential agency.

Keywords

Keywords: agency, action, moral virtue, epistemic virtue, the principle of "Ought Implies Can".

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Introduction

In the philosophy of action, the terms action, agent and agency are bound to each other. Thus, the concept and manifestation of agency depends on the action that is performed by an agent and an agent is one who acts freely, consciously and intentionally.

An action is an activity with specific characteristics, through which it is distinguished from mere happenings or bestial behaviors. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle considers action to be a voluntary activity through which the agent attains the ultimate purpose for which he was aiming by performing it. After freely choosing the act and inclination for performing it, the agent makes an intention[1] to perform it. After that, if there are no obstacles, he performs that action (Aristotle, *NE*, Bk 3). The voluntariness of action, according to Aristotle, means that the internal causes (i.e. desire and belief) result in an act being performed (1111a). We can find a detailed definition of an intentional act and agency in contemporary analytic philosophy in Anscombe (1957) and Davidson (1963 & 1980).

If we consider agency to be dependent on action, then a precise explanation of agency depends on the acceptability of the theory of action, i.e. on a theory regarding belief, desire, intention, practical reasoning, and causality. On the other hand, because of the relationship between action and the personal identity of the agent, it is notable that our perspective in philosophy of mind and ethics also affects our analysis of the concept of agency. The neuroscientist reductionist physicalists deny agency by the negation of free will and instead speak of a *sense of agency*[2], while substantial dualists consider the immaterial soul and its faculties to be the agent of mental or external activities and distinguish human behavior from that of animals through the activity of the rational faculty. In contrast, Nancey Murphy, a non-reductionist physicalist, accepts free will and agency and denies that our behavior is caused by "a separate inner agent" (such as atoms in reductionists or immaterial soul in dualists); rather, from her point of view:

> Only the person as a whole is an agent. The maps and simulations come into play in order to regulate action of the whole person (Murphy, 2007, p. 33).

With the holistic view that she holds regarding human nature[3], she considers the causality of man's actions to be a combination of downward and bottom-up causation and therefore, she is opposed to both the reductionists and the

1. If we say that intention doesn't reduce to belief and desire.
2. See for example, Sam Harris, 2012.
3. For more information about human nature in Murphy, see: *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?* (2006).

Cartesian dualists.

Korsgaard sees agency as dependent on acting on "hypothetical and categorical imperatives". Action is self-constitution, and the principles of practical rationality are constitutive principles of action and agency. By conforming to these principles we constitute ourselves as unified agents (Korsgaard, 2009, p. 25, pp. 213-214; Korsgaarad, 2019, p. 1).

Sebo (2015) and Aguilar and Buckareff (2015) do not accept agency as a distinctive element between humans and animals in the way that philosophers of actions define it because all existents can perform actions. Aguilar and Buckareff consider rationality as the distinguishing point between them and believe that each existent possesses a level of agency in harmony with its existential degree and as a result, agency is gradational. Man's rationality is the reason why his agency is more complex and maximal (Aguilar and Buckareff, 2015, pp. 30-44) and Sebo also considers thinking to be the main element of common agency between man and the others with the difference that man possesses propositional agency and animals possess perceptual agency. It is because of this that they have different moral statuses (Sebo, 2015).

The present article does not seek to explain theories of action and their components or prevailing theories of philosophy of mind; rather, the goal is to study the relationship between virtues and agency and to learn to what extent agency conceptually and metaphysically is related to moral or epistemic virtues. Do virtues have any semantic or metaphysical relation to action so that if we consider action as a sign of agency, we can conclude that agency cannot be realized without virtues? In other words, are they necessary conditions for agency? Is it true that only if a person acts due to the possession of moral virtues, moral agency finds meaning? In the same way, are epistemic virtues the cause for the actualization of epistemic agency? Or is it that virtues are beneficial merely for the moral or epistemic character of the agent and not his agency?

Now if we consider virtues to be constitutive elements of human or personal identity, can we also consider agency to be dependent on virtues? This question can be raised again if we consider virtues to be from among the basic elements of the moral and epistemic character of the agent as it is presented in virtue ethics and virtue epistemology (especially in *responsibilism*[1]).

The answers to these questions are largely dependent on our position in ethics, epistemology and even philosophy of mind. Therefore, the discussion of agency is related to epistemology, ethics, philosophy of mind, philosophy of action and logic from different perspectives.

1. For studying responsibilism, see for example, Zagzebski, L. 1996; Baehr, J., 2011.

Among the theories of ethics, virtue ethics considers ethical virtues as a basic concept of ethics and the criterion of right action, and instead of focusing on the moral act, it focuses on the moral or virtuous agent. Whereas utilitarianism and deontologism do not consider virtue to be a condition for being a moral agent nor as a criterion for the moral action, Aristotle (*2000*) and neo-Aristotelians like Anscombe (1958), Philippa Foot (2003), Rosalind Hursthouse (1999), Alasdair MacIntyre (1981) and Humean virtue ethicist Michael Slote (2003), Nietzschean philosopher Christian Swanton (2003) and neo-Stoic philosopher and a commentator of Aristotelian views Julia Annas (2011), all defend such a position despite their different versions of virtue ethics. The moral agent in this theory is the virtuous agent who acts appropriately in the circumstances due to possessing moral virtue.

In virtue epistemology too, epistemic virtue is a basic concept and in both its approaches, reliabilism, and responsibilism – particularly responsibilism which considers knowledge as a type of activity and attaining beliefs as voluntary – epistemic virtue is the condition for the manifestation of epistemic agency. Ernest Sosa (1985), John Greco (1993) as reliabilists and Linda Zagzebski (1996), Jason Baehr (2006, 2008), James Montmarquet (1993), Lorraine Code (1987) as responsibilists are advocates of this view.

If we accept that virtues play a role in agency, the principle of "Ought Implies Can" makes us face a new challenge which we will discuss. In the same way that this principle questions the necessary relation between moral obligation and the ability of the agent in ethics and in epistemology there is discussion regarding the relationship between the ability of the epistemic agent in attaining belief and the necessity of believing; so, here too, according to this principle, one can ask whether the agent can even possess virtues in such a manner that agency is conceptually and metaphysically dependent on virtues? On the other hand, can we oblige others to attain virtues in order to act and be agents, particularly if agency is considered as the distinction between human and non-human beings?

The present paper strives to define action and determine its formative components and then delves into theories of virtue so that by studying the capacities of the theory of virtue in ethics and epistemology, it can arrive at some probable answers in relation to the question of whether philosophers of action allow virtue – as an independent element – to also be necessary alongside choice, intention, and desire so that the meaning of action, its performance, and agency are all bound to possessing virtue too.

Ultimately, we conclude that not only in theories of virtue but also in other ethical theories, virtue is independently necessary for the actualization of agency; although, conceptually, there might not be any relation between the two. In many cases, virtue can also have a crucial role in prudential agency.

1. Action and Agency

In the philosophy of action, agency is bound to action (see Schlosser, 2015). Aristotle considers human action to be a voluntary activity that an agent performs consciously and intentionally (Aristotle, 1111a, 1111b, 1135b, 1136a). Voluntariness has been defined in two ways: 1. having alternate possibilities; 2. the origin of the act lies in the agent. Frankfurt addresses the first meaning (2003, pp. 87-88) while Aristotle the second (1111a). Then, according to him, the sign of an action being voluntary is that the inner causes, i.e., belief and desire result in its actualization.

The key concept in Davidson's theory of action is that an act is performed intentionally. This is why in the article, "Actions, Reasons and Causes", he considers action to be an activity that the agent performs with reason (belief and desire) (1963, pp. 687, 688). And in the article, "Agency", he considers action to be an activity performed intentionally (1980, p. 45). "A man is the agent of an act if what he does can be described underan aspect that makes it intentional" (Davidson, 1980, p. 46).

An intentional act in Davidson's view can be explained in two ways: in the first explanation, intention is reduced to belief and desire. As a result, to act, an agent does not require any other intention. If the reasons for action are the causes of it, then with desire and belief, an act must necessarily be performed; and if somewhere an act is not performed, it is because the reasons were not the causes for the action. Thus, in the first explanation, an intentional act is explained through the causality that belief and desire have towards action. Therefore, an intentional act is one in which a person believes that x is right and has a desire to perform it. This very belief and desire to perform it results in the performance of x rightly.

In the second explanation, an intentional act is one which is the effect of the intention of the agent.

Davidson's view has been criticized in different ways. In keeping with his particularist approach, Dancy does not consider belief and desire to be reasons for action at all; rather, according to him, it is the characteristics of the situations that we find ourselves in that are the reasons for action. For example, Mary is suffering and I am the only one who can help her; not that "the belief that Mary is suffering" and "the belief that I am the only one who can help her." He does not consider rational beliefs to be motivational at all. As a result, in judgment as well as action, he considers conditions to be determinant (Dancy, 2004).

Bratman does not accept explaining intention as belief and desire; and on the whole, he replaces intention with plans and the planning of the agent to perform an action (Bratman, 1987; Bratman, 1999, p. 110). McCann also

does not accept this (2013); but Ridge accepts these words by Davidson (Ridge, 1998). Hornsby has criticized Davidson more than anyone else. She does not accept a necessary relation between intention and action on one hand, because intentions don't always result in actions (Hornsby, 2004, p. 5); and on the other hand, she does not agree with the view that says that as a mental state, intention is itself of the category of action and is enough for agency (p. 4) (although it is debatable as to whether mental states are actions or not). Thirdly, she says that in order to show the causal role of the agent, it is not necessary to say that the agent is the cause of an act, because according to Hornsby, an agent is not the cause of apparent events but rather is the cause of effects and results that are attained through these motions. She considers voluntariness as a key element of action. An agent makes an intention that to reach a goal, it must act, and attainment of the goal is that an action has been performed (pp. 18-20).

Therefore, in contrast to the definitions that define action based on intention, some recognize the will as a characteristic of action; however, there are differences among voluntarists as to whether free will itself is the cause of action and the agent is considered the cause through his will or that the agent directly and through his own will and through reasons that he has, is the cause of action or that free will, in general, is a necessary and sufficient condition of action without being the cause (Lowe, 2008).

That which is presently important is that whether or not we accept intention or free will to be a necessary condition of action, that which is definite is that according to philosophers of action, firstly, agency shows itself in intentional or voluntary actions and the agent must have reasons for action in order to act; regardless of whether intention can be defined in terms of these reasons in some explanations. Secondly, for an action to be realized, the reasons for action must also be its causes. Ultimately what is meant by an action being voluntary, conscious, and intentional is that the agent must possess characteristics like voluntariness and free will so that he is able to intend or will that which he freely chose, and does not break his intention till the end, so that an action is performed. In other words, the factors that cause weakness of will, i.e. violation of resolution (Holton 1999) or failure to intend (Mele, 1987; 2010; Davidson, 2001: p. 30; 1980: p. 39) should not exist.

The question that can be asked here is: Do these characteristics, i.e. voluntariness, consciousness, and free will form personal identity; or in a more limited way do they form practical identity or arise from it? What relation does action have with the identity of the agent? We will ask these same questions about the relationship between virtue and agent identity and action.

Another question that is presented here is: If agency manifests itself in intentional actions, which action is a sign of agency, an external act or a

mental act? There is no consensus in this regard. What is meant by mental actions are activities like to will, to deliberate, to reflect, to intend and other similar things and an external action refers to bodily motions. Now if mental states like belief, desire and will, etc. are supposed to be a type of activity and action, the requisite is that we consider these mental states to be voluntary. The question about the voluntariness or involuntariness of having belief has engaged contemporary epistemologists as well: Is believing in the statement "The sky is blue" voluntary or involuntary? Voluntarists (for example, Steup, 2012; Descartes, 1641, Meditaion: 4; Ginet, 1990, pp. 61-76) believe that a person has voluntary control over his beliefs and as a result has a responsibility to believe in "p" and non-voluntarists (for example, Alston, 2005; Williams, 1973, pp. 148-149) refute voluntary control and as a result, refute epistemic responsibility of the agent regarding belief in "p".[1]

Some consider these mental activities to be actions that, when actualized, agency is also realized; actions like to will, to intend, and some believe mental states like belief and desire are causes of external action but are not themselves action (Davidson, 1971, p. 172). Accordingly, external intentional actions are effects of mental states. Some also do not consider the existence of mental states for free agency and action because they take a reductionist physicalist view of mental causation and deny free will and say that "voluntary agency is an illusion; and that willing, or choosing, is epiphenomenal" (Runyan, 2014, p. 3).

2. The Conceptual and Metaphysical Dependency of Agency and Virtue

Four types of relationships can be imagined regarding the agent and virtue; semantic, metaphysical, epistemological and motivational. The questions related to these four relations are as follows: is virtue necessary in the definition of an agent from the perspective of being an agent? Is virtue necessary for the realization of agency? Does an agent need virtue to recognize moral duties? And finally, can virtue motivate the agent to perform actions? The question, in fact, is whether virtue can be considered as a necessary element beside will, desire, and intention. In other words, is it that as long as the agent does not possess virtue his action is not considered as a human action at all? Can virtue be the reason for action? What about being a cause for it? Can it be said that virtue is one of the elements that

1. We will observe the effect of these two views on the acceptance or rejection of epistemic responsibility.

forms human identity; i.e., virtue is the aspect that distinguishes humans from non-humans?

If we divide virtues into two groups of ethical and epistemological, these questions come up in both domains; naturally, the advocates of virtue ethics and virtue epistemology (apart from the differences), answer positively to these questions. But in these views also, one can question whether the agent needs virtues to be a good person morally and epistemologically or needs to perform a moral or epistemological act? In other words, to what extent is agency dependent on these two types of virtues? Moreover, what is the view of other moral and epistemological theories in this regard? And finally, apart from the moral and epistemological aspects of an act, are virtues necessary to perform prudential actions?

Multiple forms can be conceived for agency to be metaphysically and conceptually dependent on virtues:

1. Virtue is a human characteristic which is the reason for the distinction of man from other existents like voluntariness, knowledge, and intention.
2. Virtue is the sign and cause of the goodness of a person; as a result, it is the reason for the distinction of good people (moral or epistemological) from the bad.
3. Virtues are the reason that a person performs actions more easily; i.e. it only, in fact, has a motivational and facilitating role.
4. Virtues result in the definite performance of action when a person chooses to do it because they create internal balance, integration, and unity in a person.

The requisite of the first form is that man's action and agency are both dependent on virtue. The fourth form also considers virtue to be indirectly necessary for action. The second form only takes a normative and valuative view of the agent and even if action is addressed, it still emphasizes the goodness of action rather than its metaphysical aspect. And the third form is not stating that virtue is a necessary condition for action; rather, it only says that it is good and beneficial. However, none of them speak about virtue being a sufficient condition; i.e. although it can be necessary, it does not, however, play the sole role in agency and goodness.

The Necessity of Virtue for Agency based on the Principle of "Ought Implies Can"

Before studying the necessity of virtue for agency, we must see whether virtue even exists so that possessing it is possible. Do we have a general ability to have virtues, so that based on the principle of "ought implies ability" we oblige the agent to possess it?

Based on the principle of "ought implies can", we are only obliged to perform acts that we have the ability to perform.

This principle is addressed in both ethics and epistemology (except that in epistemology, it means epistemological obligation)[1] and had advocates and opponents in both aspects[2]. One explanation of its advocates in meta-ethics is as follows:

If S ought to A at t, then S can A at t.

According to opponents "ought does not imply ability", i.e. an agent is bound to perform an action at a specific time even if he is unable to perform that action at that time. In other words, ability is not a necessary condition of obligation.

In epistemology also, this difference exists as to whether we are obliged to have belief. If we accept that belief is voluntary and an epistemic agent can acquire belief, the necessary relation is accepted. Voluntarists and non-voluntarists have different views in this regard. Feldman (2001) and Alston (2005) who consider beliefs to be non-voluntary, naturally do not accept the necessity and Zagzebski (1996) and Mizrahi (2012) are among those who have written papers in approval of this relation.

If we apply this principle to the present discussion, we can say that having virtues for an agent is obligatory only when the person has the ability to possess virtues.

There are some possibilities in this regard to question the existence of virtues in various ways and as a result, must be addressed in this discussion; they are as follows:

1. According to contemporary psychological and sociological studies, there is no stable and firm state or character trait like virtue. John Doris (2005), Christian Miller (2013) and Hartman (2002) hold this view.

2. If virtues are meant to be stable states of the soul or second nature (according to Aristotle's definition) then there is nothing like virtue for those who refute the existence of the soul or immateriality of the soul.

3. If virtues are acquirable and can be acquired through action, according to neuroscientists – since they deny libertarian free will – it is not possible to acquire virtues through voluntary actions.

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1. "The 'ought' in (OIC) is the epistemic ought. In this sense, to say that S ought to believe that p is to say that S has an epistemic obligation to believe that p. For present purposes, then, "S ought to believe that" (Mizrahi, 2012)
2. Mizrahi, in "Ought does not Imply Can"(2009), and John Martin Fischer in "My Way, Essays on Moral Responsibility" (2007) have refuted this principle and some like Vranas, in "I Ought therefore I Can" (2007) and Armstrong in "Ought Conversationally Implies Can" (1984) and Zimmerman in "The Concept of Moral Obligation" (1996), have defended this principle.

4. If personal physical or psychological inabilities are an obstacle to acting rightly and acquiring virtues, he is not obligated to acquire virtues.

5. If virtues are supposed to be among the constitutive elements of personality, due to the effect of pre-conditions in the formation of personality, it is not possible to acquire virtues because we do not choose our personalities ourselves.

Each of these statements must be studied elsewhere; in this paper, we will only indicate the last one.

If we consider virtue to be a constitutive element of personal identity, this question once again arises as to whether we do not play any role in forming our own personality, i.e. do we choose our own personality and form it through our own choice and will or is our personality under the influence of external factors not in our control, like genetic, environmental, familial factors and is formed in an involuntary and forced manner?

Here the reply would different based on the three approaches of determinism, voluntarism, and compatibilism. If we accept determinism[1] it is impossible to suppose virtues to be acquirable and as a result, it cannot be said that virtue is the condition for action and therefore, it cannot be considered a condition for agency.

According to voluntarism[2], since man's free will is not refuted or limited under any conditions, neither in choosing the right action nor in performing an action, naturally, man can form his own personality through free action and acquiring virtues and one can accept for virtue to be considered the condition for action and agency. Compatibilists[3], in contrast to these two groups, do not see an incompatibility between determinism and free will, and even while they accept the influence of internal and external factors like inheritance and environment on man's actions and personality, they do not deny man's free will; therefore, they naturally accept the role of the agent in forming his own personality through acquiring virtues and as a result, according to them, one can accept that virtue is the condition for action and agency.

There is a difference of opinion regarding the extent to which our personality is under our control and a person forms it voluntarily through his actions.

Trianosky believes that a person cannot freely choose his own personality

1. For determinism, see Pereboom (2007) and Moya (2006).
2. For the voluntarist view, as an example, see Robert Kane (2006).
3. Compatibilists justify the lack of conflict between determinism and free will in various ways. To study more about compatibilists, see for example, Harry Frankfurt (2003), John Martin Fischer (2006), and Gary Watson (1975). You can also see Khazaei and Tamadon (2013).

and therefore, a person's personality is not under a person's control or choice because there are factors and conditions like temperament, environmental factors, habits, genetic characteristics, etc. that are out of a person's control and affect his personality (Trianosky, 1990, pp. 104-105, 99). Williams also, by addressing moral luck, believes that there are factors out of a person's control which are in contrast to the control principle (voluntariness) (Williams, 1976, p. 116). As a result, luck is a direct or indirect obstacle to the formation of personality. Wolf (2007) also denies freedom of will in the formation or alteration of personality in another way; however, in contrast, Aristotle, Plato, Kant (2002, p. 9), Moody-Adams (1990, p. 111), Jacobs (2001), accept the voluntariness of personality. Korsgaard also who states in her book that we choose our personality through our actions and intentions (2009, p. 19), is an advocate of this view.

If we accept that agency is bound to human personality, and if it is true that we cannot acquire virtues because we do not have free will, it can be concluded that virtue cannot play a role in agency and action also cannot be virtuous. This view completely agrees with determinism and denies free will and therefore, performing actions holds no meaning for it or at least we do not have the ability to form the initial personality and we are not considered agents at all. But according to voluntarism and compatibilism, through accepting free will, virtue can have a role in the realization of action and agency.

3. Virtue and Action in Ethics and Epistemology

a. In Virtue Ethics

Among normative theories, Utilitarianism, Deontology and Virtue Ethics, only virtue ethics considers virtues to be the focus and criterion of ethics. The other two theories focus on the moral act rather than the moral agent. Therefore, they address the criterion of a moral act. John Stuart Mill considers a moral act to be one that has the most benefit for the most people; according to Kant, an act that is in accordance with moral duties and is performed out of respect to moral laws is a moral act. Apparently from the definitions, it seems that in the two aforementioned theories, it is not important what sort of person the agent is morally and in action too, virtue plays no role; as a result, agency has no relation with virtues.

In virtue ethics, the virtuousness of the agent in relation to the act has priority and, therefore, despite the importance of a moral act, it is not the focus; rather, moral action is conceptually and metaphysically dependent on virtue and the moral character of the agent. As a result, “An action is right if it is what a virtuous agent would characteristically (i.e. acting in character)

do in the circumstances" (Hursthouse, 1999, p. 21).

However, virtue has been defined in various ways and virtue ethics also has different versions. The common aspect between all those definitions and these versions is that virtue is a necessary condition for the rightness and the performance of a moral act. If this is true, in contrast to how we previously defined the agent based on action, here action is defined based on the agent; i.e. an action is something that the agent performs not that the agent is someone who acts. If we consider the morality of an agent to have metaphysically and semantically precedent over the rightness of action, the question arises as to whether being a moral agent[1] is dependent on the fact that a person performs a moral act or vice versa?

Consider the following states:

1. If the agent is someone who performs an action, then a moral agent is also one who performs a moral act.
2. If the concept and actualization of agency are dependent on the concept and actualization of a voluntary, conscious, and intentional action, then it must be concluded that moral agency will also be conceptually and metaphysically dependent on the concept and actualization of the moral act (voluntary, conscious, intentional and virtuous act).
3. Being a moral agent is not dependent on the performance of a moral act but the morality of an action is dependent on being a moral agent.
4. The action is morally good if the agent is virtuous.
5. A moral agent is someone who performs a moral act.
6. A moral act is one that is performed by a moral agent.

If virtues are supposed to be necessary for being an agent, the relationship between agency and virtue can be conceived in one of the above forms.

Let us look at the definition of virtue and see how virtue can enter into this relation. Aristotle, considers virtue to be a settled, inner state which is not of the category of fleeting states, potential and capacity; rather, it is a stable and lasting state (1105b, 1106a) which results in inner balance (psychological and mental) and causes a virtuous person to recognize a right action, control his emotions, gets motivated to perform the right action and ultimately, performs the moral act. Based on this definition, performing a moral act and moral agency depends on habits that have been attained through exercise and repetition, according to Aristotle (1105a). Hursthouse, Zagzebski, Foot, MacIntyre are neo-Aristotelians who, despite their differences in the definition of virtue, consider virtue to be a settled, inner

1. We will use moral and virtuous to mean the same in all these instances.

state or character trait and the actualization of a moral act to be dependent on the characteristic of the agent. Zagzebski, who considers moral exemplars to be the bases of ethics (2010; 2012), emphasizes the role of the agent more than others and defines all moral concepts, including action, as being based on the moral agent (Zagzebski, 2012, p. 157; 2010, 2017). As a result, the concept and actualization of action depend on the moral agent.

Slote, who considers virtue as a motivational trait and to mean the agent has good motivations, believes that these motivations compel the agent to perform the right act. Without this motivation, according to Slote, neither is an act moral and nor is the agent (Slote, 2001, p. 4; 2007, p. 710). Therefore, moral agency depends on the existence of virtues. In Socrates too, where virtue is knowledge (Meno) and necessarily results in action, knowing is equal to agency (Protagoras).

There is no more need to address the definitions of virtue; we will now return once again to the previous questions regarding the existence and type of relation between agency and virtue to see if virtue is a necessary condition for the performance of an action. Is virtue the condition for moral action, or of the agent or the condition for being a moral agent or is it not a necessary condition at all?

In virtue ethics, virtue is a necessary condition for the goodness of the agent as well a necessary condition for the goodness of action and a moral act is, in fact, the very act that a virtuous agent performs. If it is that virtue plays a role in agency, it must be the reason as well as the cause of action; i.e. the factors that influence the performance of an action and becoming an agent and not merely that it is the reason for praising the agent. Virtues can be reasons as well as causes of action. Because, due to the emotional factor which is present in virtue, it can motivate a person to perform an action and due to the integration or balance that it creates in a person, causes a person to definitely perform the act; in the same way that Aristotle's virtuous agent acts according to his beliefs because of this virtuousness and because he does not have an inclination opposing his beliefs. However, an akratic person, because of the inclinations that are in contrast with his beliefs or inner temptations that he cannot control, cannot perform the right action (Aristotle, book 7). Therefore, there is a necessary relation between virtue and action, particularly if we accept that virtue forms identity and our actions arise from our identities.

This relation can be seen in many ways:

1. If a person helps a poor person; if this help is not due to virtue, not only is it not a praiseworthy act, rather, it is as though an act has not been performed at all and that person is not known as an agent and agency is not actualized.

2. If a person does not possess virtue, he cannot help a poor person at all; because he will not be motivated to perform the right action. This is when we accept that virtues are necessary motivational reasons and the causes for actions.
3. If there is no virtue, the primary agent's reasons for action are not enough; i.e. although desire and belief are necessary; virtue is a completive reason.
4. Virtues are not factors alongside will, awareness, desire, and intention; rather, they are a type of background and strengthening ability for these factors; i.e., that if there are no virtues, all of them together are not enough for the performance of an action.

In the fourth state, virtue forms individual identity and causes every person to have a particular type of existence. Such a person has particular beliefs, desires, and intentions. This type of existence, which has different levels in different people, requires that every person's actions be different from others in terms of morality, per their existential level; the higher this level, the more praiseworthy is the agent and so is his action. This identity shows itself in motivational and epistemological domains. With this view, not only are moral virtues necessary for the performance of a moral act; rather, they are necessary for being an agent.

b. In Virtue Epistemology

In virtue epistemology in which epistemic virtues are the basis of epistemology, these same discussions are present and the relation between epistemic agency and epistemic virtues is discussed; although in the approaches of responsibilism, like those of Zagzeski, Baehr, Battaly, who consider believing to be a voluntary act, this relation is more perceptible. Zagzeski, borrowing the concept of eudaimonia and the definition of right action from Hursthouse, and the concept of motivation from Slote, defines epistemic virtue thus:

> "A virtue, then, can be defined as a deep and enduring acquired excellence of a person, involving a characteristic motivation to produce a certain desired end and reliable success in bringing about that end" (Zagzebski 1996, p. 137).

She believes that an epistemic agent is not only responsible for having apt beliefs because he attains beliefs; he also has the responsibility to possess epistemic virtues. According to her, virtues are character traits that are acquired through exercise and like Aristotle's moral virtues, are between two extremes.

In contrast, Sosa and Greco, with a reliabilist approach, consider virtues to be reliable intellectual powers which are a cause for the increase of apt beliefs. Despite this difference, both consider virtues to be necessary for acquiring knowledge and both believe that knowledge is only acquired when the agent possesses epistemic virtues; with the difference that Sosa (in contrast to Zagzebski) does not accept virtues to be character traits in his initial works (Sosa, 1980; 2007), but in his later works (2015a; 2015b), he accepts agency when we pass judgments in reflective knowledge and believes that in order to be an epistemic agent, we need virtues like intellectual attentiveness and carefulness[1]. He calls these virtues agential-virtues.

At any rate, in both theories, agency depends on epistemic virtue and according to Zagzebski, acquiring the virtues depends on repeating epistemic actions and in Sosa's view, mostly virtues are natural and those that are acquirable (like reasoning power) are acquired through practice. Overall, virtues are necessary for the concept and actualization of moral agency. Therefore, it is not only the characteristics of will, belief, inclination, and intention that are the causes for action and virtue too does not merely play a crucial role in the attribution of a moral trait to the agent; rather, due to the motivational role that they play in the actualization of action, they are also necessary for the actualization of agency.

4. The Fate of Action without Virtue

If virtue is a necessary condition for action, is it right to say that if an activity is performed without virtue, that activity is not an action and that person is not an agent?

Korsgaard mentioned something in this vein regarding an action that is not according to moral laws; because, according to her, the value of action is that it can form the agent.

“Action is self-constitution. And what makes actions good or bad is how well they constitute you. But since action requires agency, it follows that an action that is less successful at constituting its agent is to that extent less of an action” (Korsgaard, 2009, p. 25).

An action must be able to form a unified and integrated agent based on the principle of practical reason. According to her, an agent is as follows:

“The autonomous and efficacious cause of her own movements”... and the constitutive principles of action are the categorical and hypothetical

1. Sosa divides virtues into three types: reliable intellectual powers, agential virtues and non- agential virtues. The last ones are character traits that help the agent to know but they are not belief-conducive.

imperatives" (Korsgaard, 2009, p. 213). According to her, it is "by conforming to these principles that... you constitute yourself as an agent" (Korsgaard, 2019, p. 1).

As a result, an act that cannot form an autonomous and efficacious agent "falls somewhat short of being an action, and the agent who performs it falls somewhat short of being an agent" (Korsgaard, 2019, p. 19).

Regardless of all the criticisms that have been leveled at Korsgaard's theory, this statement by her, as a Kantian philosopher is good.

Now, can we say the same in virtue ethics, i.e., an action that does not conform with practical wisdom or intellectual and moral virtues, is not an action at all, or not virtuous? According to Aristotle also, it cannot be claimed absolutely that a non-virtuous activity is not an action at all; however, it can be claimed that this activity has no value. Because, according to him, both virtues and vices have a constitutive role in agency and action. One forms a good and praiseworthy person and the other a bad and blameworthy one.

This is why Korsgaard does not accept the relationship between virtues and agency. In (2019), she does not accept that virtues must have a constitutive role in agency. The definition that she provides for an agent, and the role that action has in the formation of individual identity and the characteristics that an action must possess according to Kantian perspective, guide her in the direction that virtues do not constitute a person; not from the perspective that virtues do not constitute actions; rather, from the aspect that according to Aristotle, only virtues have not such a characteristic.

> …for Aristotle there is a sense in which a person's virtues really are constitutive of her will… This means that if the virtues are unified, what a single virtue term refers to, strictly speaking, is the absence of a vice. The vices, unlike the virtues, are not unified and can exist apart… But it does not immediately follow that Aristotelian virtues are constitutive standards in my sense. For on Aristotle's conception, a person's vices are also constitutive of her will (Korsgaard, 2019, p. 10).

As it is clear in this passage, Korsgaard, based on Kant's theory, does not accept that a vicious person's actions are actions, because such a person does not possess internal unity; therefore, he is not an agent at all.

Aristotle also accepts that virtues are a cause for the integration, i.e. inner coherence of a person and as a result, they result in the performance of apt action. According to Kant, this balance is acquired through adherence to the principles of practical reason and according to Aristotle, through adherence to practical wisdom. Therefore, virtue is not a factor separate from other factors; rather, in order to create, rectify, preserve and strengthen will,

forming beliefs and protecting them and balancing emotions in harmony with the intellect, virtues are needed as a necessary factor for forming moral personality, performing a moral act and for being an agent. According to this, vices are in contrast to virtues in every aspect. Vices result in the performance of bad actions, badness of an agent, incorrect understanding, bad inclinations, and bad intentions. If we have a valuative view of action from the beginning, like Korsgaard's view, Aristotle's theory is faced with a problem in this regard. However, if we view the theory of virtue as an efficient theory in philosophy of action, it is a more precise theory from this respect that a vicious activity is also a type of activity because it has been performed with will, intention and even choice; i.e., a person has decided from the beginning to perform a wrong act. This statement is one of those cases regarding which philosophers of action must decide which person's actions are they discussing and what do they mean by a human being? Are they supposed to be theorizing about the actions of people who have the ability to perform voluntary, intentional and conscious actions regardless of whether they are good or bad?; an existent that has the ability to be good or bad?; or only existents that actually possess these characteristics? [1]

Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to address some probable relations between virtues and agency. We have observed that, according to the theory of virtue, in ethics and epistemology, virtues are necessary for moral and epistemic agency. However, this does not mean that without virtues, an action is not an action. This means that it is true that without virtues, an act is not virtuous or moral and its agent is also not moral and in epistemology, he is not an epistemic agent; however, considering the moral and epistemological goal, since such a person cannot perform his duty correctly, he is therefore not an agent in its true sense, not that the person is merely not moral. It is the same regarding epistemology. But, at the same time, it is possible that human activity as a voluntary and intentional act has taken place. In a general meaning and considering the general characteristics of man, a vicious act is also action, just as a vicious person too, with this perspective, is a human being and not a snail or sea animal!

What we have said so far is regarding the theory of virtue; however, what position does virtue hold in other moral theories?

1. Characteristics, here, refer to free will, consciousness, virtues and vices, and agency.

Even though other theories have not mentioned virtue in the definition of action, and as a consequence, agency, do not consider virtues to be criteria for the rightness of action; however, they cannot refuse the motivational role of virtues in performance of moral duties. Similarly, if having free will is necessary for agency, even if virtues are not part of the constitutive components of agency, they are still necessary for the preservation of will because virtues bring about inner balance and this is necessary for agency. To be free of vices and possessing different moral virtues is also necessary for utilitarians and deontologists to acquire more benefits with the motivation of providing more benefit or obeying moral laws with goodwill. Moreover, in understanding moral duties too, both epistemic and moral virtues are necessary even if we may be among the generalists epistemologically.[1]

1. For more information, see Khazaei, 2011.

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